Speaking to the Future

A Statement of Government Policy on the Status of Aboriginal Women in Manitoba

March 9, 1992
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Introduction:

The Aboriginal population of Manitoba is 82,235 (1986 Census) including Status, non-Status Indians, Metis and Inuit peoples. This policy focuses on the female component of Manitoba's Aboriginal population.

As of 1992, about 43,370 Aboriginal women live in Manitoba. Aboriginal women fill a range of occupations, including band and community constables, special RCMP officers, lawyers, educators, civil service workers, nurses, doctors, social workers, community health workers, community development workers, child care workers, taxi drivers, band and community council administrators, fire fighters, artists, entrepreneurs, clerical, service and factory workers.

In addition to their contribution to the Manitoba economy through labour force participation, Aboriginal women are active volunteers and have played a strong leadership role in the development of Aboriginal communities.

In recent years, Manitoba has witnessed the emergence of Aboriginal women as elected leaders. Although still small in number, Aboriginal women are increasingly assuming positions such as Mayor, Chief or councillor within their communities.

Manitoba's cultural mosaic has also been greatly enriched by the leadership role of Aboriginal women in

preserving Aboriginal language and traditional culture.

However, despite their many contributions and developing role as leaders, Aboriginal women continue to face special challenges. Among these are high unemployment, very low income, conflict with the law, poor health and a high incidence of suicide and teenage pregnancies.

As with all women, Aboriginal women also have to deal with issues such as abuse, negative stereotyping and limited participation in decision-making positions. For Aboriginal women, the situation is compounded by isolation, language differences and extreme negative stereo-typing, which perpetuate prejudice, discrimination and racism.

As a government, we recognize these challenges and are committed to fostering heightened sensitivity to Aboriginal women's issues and increased willingness to respond to them.

As a reflection of this commitment, we will work to establish a partnership with provincial Aboriginal women. Partnership rests on recognition of the need for a new approach to policy and program planning activity. It means moving away from non-productive patterns of confrontation toward a participatory model that draws upon the abilities of citizens to develop solutions to problems. Partnership means working with, as opposed to working on behalf of the citizens of Manitoba.

Guiding Principles:

Successive governments have undertaken various initiatives, such as the creation of the Manitoba Women's Directorate, to promote, protect and enhance rights and opportunities for all women.

Through this policy, the Government of Manitoba acknowledges the aspirations and unique challenges of our province's Aboriginal women. We recognize that the potential of the Aboriginal women's community has yet to be fully tapped. We also recognize that special measures must be taken to ensure Aboriginal women's contributions and abilities are acknowledged and affirmed.

The Government of Manitoba, its departments and agencies shall be guided in all future actions and programs by **eight fundamental principles** relating to government activity and provincial Aboriginal women. These principles are as follows:

- **Manitoba recognizes that the federal government has a special trust or fiduciary relationship with status Indian peoples.**

  Nothing in this policy is intended to reduce, interfere with or in any way abrogate that special trust relationship.

- **The Government of Manitoba is committed to establishing a partnership with Aboriginal women.**

  The government further recognizes this partnership as the cornerstone in successfully developing provincial policies, programs and services.

- **This policy shall encompass those provincial programs, services and activities within provincial authority and jurisdiction.**

- **Recognizing that economic independence remains an important goal for Aboriginal women, the Government of Manitoba will continue to work with Aboriginal women to enhance their opportunities.**

- **Aboriginal women, including those who live in remote and isolated areas, have the right to access and benefit fully from provincial programs, services and activities along with all Manitoba citizens.**

- **The government acknowledges that Aboriginal women face special challenges.**

  Accordingly, government programs and services, in their design and implementation, will continue to enhance opportunities for Aboriginal women to develop to their fullest potential.

- **To increase the participation of Aboriginal women in provincial decision-making processes, they will be actively recruited as members of provincial boards and commissions.**

  They will participate in the development of provincial policies and strategies for Aboriginal women.

- **Government will focus its resources in two main areas: those that have shown positive results for Aboriginal women, and those that demonstrate untapped potential for Aboriginal women's presence, benefit and contributions.**

Meeting the Challenges:

The Government of Manitoba recognizes a partnership is required to achieve the full participation of Aboriginal women in the province.

Government believes that only though this partnership will real changes take place for Aboriginal women. The importance of Aboriginal women's participation will be recognized and enhanced by government in ongoing planning and development processes, particularly as they affect Aboriginal people.

Government has demonstrated its continuing commitment to this partnership through the core funding of the provincial Aboriginal women's umbrella organization in order to facilitate participation in the political process. As well, funding has been provided for innovative housing projects; an urban Aboriginal women's shelter; leadership development and board training; and supports for participation in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry and the preservation, sharing, and promotion of Aboriginal cultures.

Aboriginal family violence has been clearly identified as another area that must be addressed to ensure the future vitality of Aboriginal women and their communities. Government will pursue avenues to ensure Aboriginal women are assisted in their efforts toward practical and culturally appropriate intervention.

Government further recognizes that Aboriginal women must play an increased role in Aboriginal justice. Their past contributions have laid the foundation for existing services that benefit Aboriginal peoples. As such, government aims to enrich Aboriginal women's participation throughout the justice system in the province.

Government realizes the importance of initiatives that contribute to the development of opportunities for Aboriginal women.

The basis for future activity on Aboriginal women's issues includes government initiatives in the following areas:

- Social Services/Family Violence/Justice;
- Health;
- Education/Training/Economic Development;
- Housing;
- Access to government; and
- Community partnerships.

As a unique component of the provincial Aboriginal women's community, Aboriginal women with disabilities, with their particular challenges and insights, shall be actively encouraged to participate in all initiatives targeting Aboriginal women.

Government will maintain support to enable Aboriginal women to participate in developing provincial policy and program options through meetings,

conferences and negotiations in tripartite forums. Following the 1988 Women's Initiative, the government announced the 1990 Government Policy on the Status of Women and the accompanying Action Plan. Through further consultation with Aboriginal women, the Government of Manitoba has produced this policy to respond to Aboriginal women's concerns on a range of issues.

Commitment to full participation of all Manitobans in the growth and development of our province remains a priority for this government. This can only be achieved when the significant contributions of Aboriginal women are recognized, and opportunities are provided to enhance the participation of Aboriginal women.

This 1992 Manitoba Policy on Aboriginal women represents the combined efforts of government and Aboriginal women citizens of Manitoba to become partners in looking forward to, and achieving a better future for Aboriginal women in our province.

The Honourable Gary Filmon
Premier of Manitoba

The Honourable Bonnie Mitchelson
Minister responsible for the Status of Women

The Honourable James Downey
Minister of Northern Affairs

Government wishes to acknowledge the supportive role played by Aboriginal women in the development of this policy. Throughout the province, these women took time from their families and jobs to offer their advice and assistance. Thank you. Your valuable contributions made the creation of this policy possible.

One provincial forum, five regional meetings and numerous local and individual meetings were held throughout Manitoba during the policy exploration phase. More than 200 Aboriginal women participated in these discussions, including elders, educators, political leaders, social service workers, tradeswomen, homemakers, students, artists, health professionals, business women, public servants, rural, northern, isolated and urban Aboriginal women.